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# RABINDRANATH TAGORE ON THE RAMAYANA & THE MAHABHARATA

BHABATOSH DATTA

THE ASIATIC SOCIETY
1 Park Street, Calcutta - 16

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# RABINDRANATH TAGORE
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# THE RAMAYANA & THE MAHABHARATA

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TO

PROFESSOR DILIP KUMAR BISWAS

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## PREFATORY NOTE

The Asiatic Society encourages research programmes on various aspects of Indian culture and civilization. The study of Tagore literature is one of them. It is appropriate that Rabindranath's reflection on the two great epics of India should be made the subject of such on enquiry, for these two great epics mould the spirit and consciousness of India, and they are of great historical moral and literary significance. I am glad that Professor Bhabatosh Datta has evaluated the contributions of Tagore to the study of the two great Indian epics.

Calcutta
7. 9. 1995

CHANDAN ROYCHAUDHURI
GENERAL SECRETARY

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# PREFACE

Himself being one of the greatest poets of India, Rabindranath Tagore's study of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* is sure to be interesting to the readers of our time. A creative artist of the highest order Rabindranath shows rare insight in assessing the historical, literary as well as the moral and ethical significance of these epics. Like his innumerable predecessors in Bengali and other Indian languages Rabindranath also drew inspiration from them and recreated some of the characters and situations interpreting them in his own way.

My attempt in these two articles has been threefold : to examine Tagore's opinions and ideas about the origins of *Valmiki Ramayana* and *Vyasa Mahabharata;* to analyse the literary assessment made by Rabindranath and thirdly to examine the nature of Rabindranath's adoption from the epics in respect of his own creation.

Rabindranath's works are mostly in Bengali and hence the quotations taken from his works had to be translated into English. Although those passages have been suitably spaced no quotation mark has been used for obvious reasons.

I am indebted to my friends Sri Dwijadas Bandyopadhyaya of Rabindra Bhavan and Dr Jiban Krishna Bandyopadhyaya of the English Department, both of Visva Bharati for their untiring help for preparing the manuscripts in the present form. I especially thank the former for his zeal and meticulous appreciation of these papers. Dr Bhavasankar Mukhopadhyaya, Research Associate, of the Sanskrit Department, has kindly checked the Sanskrit texts quoted in these papers. The final checking of the proof was done by Dr. Bibekananda Banerjee, the manuscript department of the Asiatic Society.

Last but not the least, it is due to the inspiration of Dr Chandan Roychaudhuri, General Secretary, Asiatic Society that the publication of this slim volume has been possible and for this I am grateful to him.

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# RABINDRANATH AND THE RAMAYANA

We have certain vague ideas that Rabindranath liked the *Ramayana* more than the *Mahabharata.* It is difficult to produce any factual evidence in support of such a belief. As about the *Ramayana,* there are also many laudatory comments about the *Mahabharata* interspersed in Rabindra literature. As from the *Ramayana*, he has also taken material from the *Mahabharata* for composing poems anew. Truly he has not written any full-length essay on the *Mahabharata* as he wrote on the *Ramayana*, but then there was an occasion when he was requested to write the foreword to Dinesh Chandra Sen's *Ramayani Katha.* Likewise he looked over children's prose narrative *Kurupandava* written by Suren Tagore and based on the *Mahabharata* story.

Notwithstanding all this, perhaps the reason for thinking that the *Ramayana* was dearer to Rabindranath is that there is a natural affinity of like-mindedness between Rabindranath and Valmiki. This mental and poetic affinity is not there with the poet of the *Mahabharata.* The *Mahabharata* is in fact a many-splendoured eventful epic packed with multifarious episodes and bristling with human characters. This epic reflects the glory of life's stern, serious and noble aspects which are evident in man's criss-cross fights with destiny, his mental conflicts, happiness, good fortunes, virtues and vices. The story of the *Mahabharata* is as complex as it is dramatic in its expositions of manifold human activities — its lust and love, heroism and sacrifice, aspirations and conspiracy, success and failure, revenge and forgiveness. True, Bhishma has explained all about the moral ethics, religiosity, duties and improprieties in the canonical episodes of the *Mahabharata*, but if there is any theory in the whole design of the *Mahabharata,* it is the incomprehensible destiny which could not be explained by the poet and which he tried to explain only through the lessons of the last resort of disinterested action and spirit of renunciation as propounded by the *Bhagavad*

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*Gita*. Rabindranath has himself observed about the *Mahabharata* :

> There is a great spirit of renunciation in the *Mahabharata* that steadily and persistently holds out in its stir of actions. Actually action is not an end in itself in the epic. The sweet and sad tune of the final journey is being played, as it were, amidst the valour and heroism, love and hatred, envy and vengeance, efforts and successes emanating from the pyre.
>
> This tune is audiable in the *Ramayan* also and we find the same concept here — entire arrangement goes in vain, the attainments within grip slip down and all ends in renunciation. Yet the greatness of performance and the effect of masculinity shine like the silvery-white towering mountain amidst sacrifices, sorrows and failures.[1]

There is a distinct, Indian point of view in both the poems and Rabindranath has noted that. Yet there is a difference between the poetic construction of the *Ramayana* and that of the *Mahabharata*. While the former is a work of a single poet, the latter is the composition of many and a collection of verses. Because it is a work of a single poet, we feel in the *Ramayana* such an imaginative distinction which is different from the *Mahabharata*. The *Ramayana* story is built round Rama's character and the whole attention of the poet is devoted to depict the glorious excellences of this personality. At the same time the poet is careful in unfolding some ideals through other characters of the *Ramayana* as well. The poet is very alert that these fundamental ideals get exact shapes and are not damaged by any hostile forces. In the opinion of Rabindranath :

> The special feature of the *Ramayana* is that it has given a magnificent dimension to our homely affairs. It has ennobled us. The affectionate attachments and religious bonds that are there between father and son, between brothers, husband and wife are raised to such magnitude that these aspects have easily been transformed into worthy material of an epic. Victory over alien lands, annihilation of enemies, the fierce clashes between two formidable hostile forces — these happenings generally produce volatility and animation in epics. But the *Ramayana's* greatness does not depend on the wars between Rama and Ravana. On the other hand, these wars serve as devices to glorify the conjugal

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felicity in the relationship between Rama and Sita. . .[2]

Actually Rabindranath has magnified the specific aspect of his own liking in his analysis of the *Ramayana* and the serenity of the domestic bliss of the epic has deeply impressed him. It is not unknown to the attentive readers of Rabindra literature that these simple, natural aspects of life have always appeared to him to be of supreme bliss. Dramatic bravado, disturbances and agitations due to conflicts and hostilities — all these did not attract him. Beharilal's simple lyrics were nearer to his heart than Michael or Hemchandra's epics. He was more attracted to Bankim Chandra's domesticated Suryamukhi of *Visha-Vriksha* than his artificial eventful historical novels. He advised his friend Shrish Chandra Majumdar to leave aside his infatuation for writing historical novels and take to depicting homely life. He has explained the beauty of simple, natural life in letter after letter of *Chinnapatra.* He has shown proneness towards lyric, abandoning the idea of writing epic in his 'Kalpana' poems. His *Jivansmriti* gives clear hint that he did not much like the kind of dramatic conflicts and clashes that take place in European plays and epics.

The special features of the *Mahabharata* story are such that the sweetness and grace, love and attachment of our simple life are lost in the whirlpool of war, conspiracy murder, land disputes, dice betting, arsons, fraud and deception. There is no natural affinity between this kind of imaginative process and that of Rabindranath. *Mahabharata's* life as if belongs to another planet and the stories of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* belonging to heroic age have an affinity with the story of the *Mahabharata.* Of course in no other epic in the world where we can find such models of high principles and ideals as we do in the *Mahabharata.* Similarly, we shall not find such pictures of love between individuals, sweet conjugal life of Rama and Sita in exile, Rama's pangs due to separation from Sita and the beauties of nature in any epic other than the *Ramayana.* It may be epical in dimension, but throughout the poem one can feel the touch of sincerity of an outstanding individual poet. On the whole there is a lyrical ring in the *Ramayana* and perhaps this especially moved Rabindranath's heart.

The projected image of Rama's character that we have in the very

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beginning of the first part of the *Ramayana* is also close to Rabindranath's ideals. This epic was not composed to eulogise the greatness of God, but the aim was rather to glorify man's character — 'Ramayana is the story of that moon-like man and not of God!' This is also the chief reason why Rabindranath had such special liking for the *Ramayana*. Admittedly his Ramachandra had some human weaknesses, yet, on the whole, he is an ideal human being.

'The Indian poet has composed the epic to set up the highest ideal of man and since that time up to this day the reading public of India have been pursuing this depiction of ideal character most eagerly.'[3]

The time of composing the poem 'Bhasha O Chhanda' is close to the writing of the essay 'Ramayana'. The inner implication of the epic as Rabindranath understood it is pronounced clearly in the two writings. The poet has unhesitatingly expressed in this essay his belief that if it was the depiction of a godly character, the glory of this poem would not be there and the poetic excellence would have been impaired. The same is the poet's assertion in the poem 'Bhasha O Chhanda'. Valmiki told Narada that this universe is already an expression of divine glory, what newness would he add by describing it in his poetry. Therefore, he would want to write poetry by singing only the greatness of man. Narada then narrated to him the story of Ramachandra. The *Ramayana* starts with the dialogues between Narada and Valmiki. But it has not been, of course, avowedly declared that he would desist from describing the greatness of God, though there is the depiction of Rama's character. Narada's description of Ramachandra is about an ideal man. Rabindranath has referred to God in his poem 'Bhasha O Chhanda', but Valmiki has clearly stated that in his projected *Ramayana* the divine description is unnecessary. It is clear from this as to from which angle Rabindranath looks at the *Ramayana*. The subject of this epic is man, not God.

Yet Ramchandra has ever been worshipped as God. Ramchandra is taken to be the incarnation of Vishnu; he is one of the ten 'Vishnu Avataras'. At least five hundred years before, Jaideva chanted the praise of 'Dasha Avatara' in his *Gita-Govinda* when Ramachandra was already established as an incarnation of Vishnu. Kalidasa has described the process of Ramachandra becoming 'Vishnu Avatara'

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in his *Raghuvansha*. In the tenth canto Vishnu says in answer to the god's prayer : सोऽहं दाशरथिर्भूत्वा रणभूमेर्वलिक्षामम्
करिष्यामि शरैस्तीक्ष्णैस्तच्छिरः कमलोच्चयम्।

At another place of *Raghuvansha*, Ramachandra has been described as : शमाभिधानो।[5]

Apart from this, one of the Avataras mentioned in the 'Shanti Parva' of the *Mahabharata* in Narayani's part where Avataras have been referred to is Dasharathi Rama.[6] All these references occur in the fifth century or before. Since then the 'Avatarahood' of Ramachandra is established. But it is to be noted that there is no mention of Vishnu turning out into Ramavatara in the dialogues of Narada in the Adi Kanda of the *Ramayana*.

At the same time it is also admitted that a detailed story is given in the Uttara Kanda, narrating the greatness of Vishnuavatara. That this 'Uttar Kanda' is a later addition was noticed by scholars during their analyses in the nineteenth century. Weber wrote : "It is by no means implied that the poem was of these dimensions from the first; here, too, many parts are certainly later additions; for example, all those portions in which Rama is represented as an incarnation of Vishnu, all the episodes in the first book, the whole of the seventh book etc.[7]

Scholars have marked that the original or the early and later additions have the tendency to show Ramachandra as both human being and God. Of course, there is also a subtle argument in ascertaining the reading of the text. But Rabindranath did not go into this subtle reading, neither did he accept the divine consecration of Ramachandra. It is also true that the history of setting up of Ramachandra as God is almost two thousand years old. Especially the Krittibas *Ramayana* that Rabindranath read in his boyhood was full of praise for the greatness of Ramachandra's godhead. This fact Rabindranath did not deny and a logical justification has been given by him in this regard. In his essay, 'Sahityasristi' (1907), Rabindranath, after showing Ramachandra as human being and while expounding the relationship of life to creative writing has shown that the society has extolled Ramachandra as God through devotion. He said :

The moment Rama's image is raised to a God-figure, all his arduous heroic exploits lose their nature of impossibility. The very narration of those accomplishments glorifies Rama's

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character, therefore, does not sound adequate.

In that case the very idea that makes a godly character dear to man, gets upperhand in poetry and that idea is concerned with the devotion to God. The Rama of Krittibasa is affectionately attached to his devotee. He rescues the sinner and the lowest of the low, and embraces Guhaka Chandala, the man belonging to the depressed caste as a friend. Even the monkeys of the forest are blessed by his love. This all stands apart as the playful expressions of the devotional emotion in the *Ramayana*.[8]

The Uttara Kanda of the *Ramayana* is full of divine and not human greatness. Scholars do not think that this part is the work of Valmiki and Rabindranath has also a view of his own in regard to this doubt. In the essay *Kadambarichitra* (1899), Rabindranath has discussed the method of writing story in the ancient literature. In his opinion the ancient Indian people had little interest in listening to story, for it is often seen that the flow of the story is repeatedly obstructed by the critical discussions and digressions. That is why many interpolations slip into the main story and "the interpolated parts cannot survive unless they are borne with by the readers." He thinks that the Uttara Kanda of the epic is also an interpolation in the original *Ramayana*. He observes :

Is it that easy to demolish unhesitatingly what is there in the lone Uttara Kanda of the story and which is filled with joys and sorrows in the six parts? Can any one who has even the least control over a story tolerate such unexpected intrusion? The very influence of the spirit of renunciation with the help of which we have withstood the various relevant and irrelevant impediments of the story has helped us in keeping our cool at the sudden accidental collapse of the story.[9]

Therefore, the sacrifice of Sita and the narration of Ramachandra's divine glory as we find in the Uttara Kanda have caused the unnatural death of the story of the *Ramayana*. What he wanted to say is that from the point of view of naturalness there was no seventh part (Kanda) in the original epic. It could not possibly be the plan of the story-teller that Sita should be first rescued and then sacrificed. What Rabindranath has observed from the point of view of aesthetic sense gets support also from the readings. There are two contents in the poetic plans of the Valmiki *Ramayana*. The first content consist

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in the very beginning of the epic where Narada narractes Rama's story in the summary way in response to Valmiki's question. In this narration we find it only up to the episode of rescue of Sita and Ramchandra's father-like concern for the subjects and also the resultant effect of reading poetry. So it is clear that the poet in the earliest part wanted to compose the epic up to this extent. The second content is in the second canto in the same part.[10]

We find in this canto that Valmiki, pained at the killing of the curlews and after uttering the wellknown verse, seated himself in meditation and then he perceived Rama's character in detail. That also contains the subject of the sacrifice of Sita. According to scholars some later poet who added the Sita sacrifice story to the original *Ramayana* in the Uttara Kanda had also added the second content in the Adi Kanda of the epic. No other possible conjecture can be adduced from the fact of listening to the story of Rama only once and repeating it and at the same time adding the episode of the sacrifice of Sita. Narada's narration to Valmiki and then the prayer for Brahma's blessing for the creation of poetry, do not adjust naturally to the main story. The method applied to the writing of the Uttara Kanda is like that of the *Purana* composition full of the activities of the gods and goddesses and various supernatural happenings.

It seems that Rabindranath used to nourish this kind of belief about the Uttara Kanda of the *Ramayana*. The poet did not mince words in later times when he observed :

> The Uttara Kanda appeared with the jargon of a particular age. The restrictions that were imposed in that age could not any more allow the acceptance of Sita in the family without protest after her long stay in the house of Ravana. It was an injustice to send Sita to forest, giving priority to public opinion and to have the ultimate necessity of taking Sita's trial through fire — all this solution of social problems sat like a ghost on the shoulders of the character. The ordinary listeners of the time extolled the poet taking it to be something of very high order. As a result of that extolments this patched up part is still there attached to the living body of the original Ramayana.[11]

But it is not known to me whether he has expressed any doubt

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about the Adi Kanda, yet the scholars are not free from doubt even about that part. Weber's opinion has already been referred to. In his view all the episodes of the Adi Kanda are later additions. Notably, events up to Rama's marriage are described in the Adi Kanda. In the first part of the first canto there is no mention of Rama's marriage. The epic actually begins from the time of Rama's installation as a crown prince. But in the second part we have Rama's boyhood, education, marriage and all that. It seems, as if, the poet who wrote the Uttara Kanda wrote the Adi Kanda too. It may be conjectured that the original *Ramayana* consists of five parts. But if we exclude the Adi Kanda we have then also to exclude many well-known and delightful events, one of which is the marriage of Dasaratha's sons round which Krittibas has given a fine description of marriage ceremony in a Bengali society. Lakshmana is married to Urmila at the same time when Rama is married to Sita. But after marriage Urmila goes out of the picture of the *Ramayana* story, so Rabindranath has described her as 'the neglected one in poetry.' Rabindranath thought, the poet of the *Ramayana* did not for once remember Urmila at the time of Lakshmana voluntarily accompanying Rama to forest. In the words of Rabindranath :

We saw Urmila only once, dressed as a bride, in the marriage assembly hall in the city of Videha. Since the time when she entered the large private chamber of the royal dynasty of Raghu, I do not remember to have seen her ever for one day. Her bridal image in the marriage assembly hall remains only in our memory.[12]

Undoubtedly, Rabindranath's analysis is very fascinating, but the subject itself is not there at all in the original' *Ramayana*. In the forest where Ramchandra refuses to entertain Surpanakha's advances he jokingly says, "You get hold of Lakshmana; he is a bachelor," अनुजस्त्वेष मे भ्राता शीलवान् प्रियदर्शनः।
श्रीमानकृतदाराश्च लक्ष्मणो नाम वीर्य्यवान्।"[13]

Rabindranath has regretted the fact in his essay, 'Kavyer Upekshita', that in the sequence of events in the *Ramayana* there is even no passing mention of Urmila. He did not give a thought to the *Ramayana* story in this context. Urmila was not there at all in the imagination of the first poet (Adikavi). Urmila was there in fact in the imagination of the person who added Uttara Kanda to the

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*Ramayana*. In Bhavabhuti's *Uttara Rama Charita*, a humorous statement is put in the mouth of Sita about Urmila when Lakshmana was showing a picture of the forest to Rama and Sita.

When Sita, pointing her finger to this portrait, asks, 'Lakshmana, who is this lady?' Lakshman shyly feels "Ah, she is hinting at Urmila". But even this incident is not there in the Uttara Kanda of the conventional version of the *Ramayana*. Rabindranath was aware of this. Refering to this portrait sketched by Bhavabhuti, he says in the essay, 'Kavyer Upekshita', "That very sketch was flashed for a moment in the poetry of Bhavabhuti."[14]

Evidently, Rabindranath did not study the *Ramayana* critically, from the angle of a critical reader ; he studied the epic as a reader whose mind is enriched with aesthetic perceptions, though he knew that the Uttara Kanda was not there in the original *Valmiki Ramayana* and that the poet of this part was different. Yet he reviewed the work in such a way that, as if, the same poet who after describing the marriage of Lakshmana with Urmila, removed the image of Urmila completely in the Uttara Kanda. That he was considering the *Ramayana* as a whole may be inferred from the fact that — he was perhaps expecting a reference to Urmila in the Uttara Kanda also.

Did Rabindranath think that the poet who wrote the Adi Kanda also wrote the Lanka Kanda? Even some scholars have expressed doubt whether the Adi Kanda was really a part of the original *Ramayana*. Yet some think that a few pieces of the Adi Kanda are Valmiki's composition. But there is no doubt that most of them are interpolated[15] and there are good many reasons to think so. First. Valmiki is presented in the beginning as a described character. Secondly, there are many narrations here which are written in the style of the Uttara Kanda where we meet many supernatural occurrences. Thirdly, Ramachandra and Vishnu have been considered inseparable at many places, and this was not Valmiki's angle of vision.

Naturally, Rabindranath did not want to stand in the way of enjoyment of the poetic excellence; rather he had collected the material for his famous poems from this source. The materials of the dance dramas and poems — 'Valmiki Pratibha', 'Bhasha O Chhanda' 'Ahalya Prati' 'Patita' — are taken from the *Ramayana* which are

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also the subjects of the Adi Kanda of the epic and only the subject of 'Kal Mrigaya' is taken from the Ayodhya Kanda. It does not seem probable that Rabindranath had any special purpose in taking the subject of his poetry specially from the Adi Kanda. The style of writing and the nature of the subject are such that it may not be surmised as a part of the original *Ramayana*, but if we read it in a general way, there cannot be any bar at all in reading the Adi Kanda as the beginning of the original *Ramayana*. However, we are not sure whether Rabindranath had any doubt about the Adi Kanda.

But all the poems of Rabindranath based on the *Ramayana* theme have been enriched with new meanings, except 'Valmiki Pratibha' written at the age of twenty. The poet himself admitted that 'Valmiki Pratibha' is the result of Beharilal's influence. Not only some lines from Beharilal's 'Sarada Mangal', even the basic ideas have remained in due sequence in Rabindranath's play. The same is the case in 'Kal Mrigaya'. But in other poems e.g. 'Patita', 'Ahalyar Prati' and 'Bhasha O Chhanda' Rabindranath's independent effort is obvious; The distinctive way of presentation does not tally with that of Valmiki. There is a great difference difference between the poems based on the *Mahabharata* and those based on the *Ramayana*. There is little difference between Karna of 'Karna Kunti Sambad' and that of the *Mahabharata*, whatever the subtlety in Rabindranath's poem may be. Of course, Ramachandra's ideal humanism as expressed through language and metre is not different from Narada's description of the ideal character in the Adi Kanda, but the central metaphor of this poem is : "man's language is bound by verbal meaning/That revolves round man, ceaselessly, day and night/Its life span becomes thin to meet the needs of man". (Free translation of Rabindranath's lines in Bengali).

The significance of poetry does not lie in verbal meaning only, rather it depends on the creation of its suggestive significance. Prosodic device infuses tune and melody to meaning-bound language and flashes the suggestion of the infinite, and gives a glimpse of the indescribable. The very title of the poem itself signifies the process of literary creation which is again the central idea of the poem. But this was not the poet Valmiki's idea in the Adi Kanda. Obviously, this is Rabindranath's supposition.

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The source of the poem 'Patita' is the fable of Rishyashringa. This story is in the ninth and tenth cantos of the Adi Kanda[16] of the *Ramayana*. There the account of Rishyashringa is a serially adjusted tale and the women are prostitutes. No special distinction is attributed to any of these public women in the tale. Rather we see in the story of the *Mahabharata* that the prostitutes hearing the order of Lomapada, came back in fear of Rishyasringa's father, Bibhandak. An old prostitute took up that responsibility and she came forward along with her troupe of prostitutes to tempt him. She sent her daughter to Rishyashringa. Here the old prostitute was successful in her mission. Rabindranath was perhaps, influenced by the story of the *Mahabharata*. We find in the poem 'Patita' the young public woman while bathing in waters of the river, holds Rishyashringa in embrace. There is no mention of any river or pond in the *Ramayana*, but it is there in the *Mahabharata*. That old prostitute making a beautiful hermitage ('Nabyashrama') in a boat tied it near the hermitage of Bibhandaka, the sage. They entered the hermitage from the bank of the river.

अतीव रमणीयं तदतीव च मनोहरम्।
चक्रे नाव्याश्रमं रम्यमद्भुतोपदर्शनम्।।

There is no special great quality of womanhood among the prostitutes, neither in the *Ramayana* nor in the *Mahabharata*. There are detailed descriptions of feminine frivolities, physical beauties and tempting gestures. That is why, despite collecting the seeds of story from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata,* the 'Patita' is the fruit of Rabindranath's own imagination as the discussions of language and metre in 'Bhasha O Chhanda' are his own.

This special charactristics is to be found also in the poem 'Ahalyar Prati' (1890). This poem rather creates quite a good deal of delusions. For, except in the title, it has no link or contextual connections with the story of the *Ramayana*. If we read the poem dissociating ourselves from the title, we cannot find any trace in it of having any link with any episode of the *Ramayana*. The poem begins like this.

How did you spend then the long days and nights/Ahalya, like a stone piece, mixed with the earth/without a hermit, the sacrificial fire put off/under the shades of the secluded forest of the hermitage.

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Then, he draws a conclusion after describing beautifully, enriched with imagination and language the mother earth's days and nights, in spring, rains and winter, the touch of strange feelings, dreams, awakenings, silent dropping of dews, covering by mosses, the familiar flow of life around :

You are wondering at the universe. The universe becomes speechless, looking at you. Both are face to face on the verge of limitless mystery. Fresh and new in the midst of eternal familiarity.

There is a description of adultery on the part of Devraj Indra with Ahalya, the beautiful wife of Gautam, in the Ahalya episode of the Adi Kanda of the *Ramayana*, but even the slightest hint about this is not found in this poem. We cannot guess from this poem that the poet has collected material from that story of the *Ramayana*. We read in the Adi Kanda of Valmiki *Ramayana* that Indra physically meets Ahalya during the absence of Maharshi Gautam and Ahalya consents. Returning home, Gautam understands everything and curses Ahalya in that she will perform penance ramaining away from public view. अकृशा सर्वभूतानाम् —*Adi Kanda.*

One day Dasaratha's son Ramachandra will deliver her from the sin. There is nothing about Ahalya turning into stone in this story. Away from public view, Ahalya will go on waiting for Ramachandra, only this much is said. In the Uttara Kanda in the *Ramayana*, this story is a little more extended.[17] It is just a fable orally transmitted that Ahalya was turned to stone by the curse of her husband and the source of this story is *Krittibas Ramayana*. On the other hand, in the first canto of Krittibasa's *Ramayana*, the Ahalya story is slightly different. She did not recognize the disguised personality of Indra, and Ahalya co-operated for gratifying Indra's lust, taking him to be her husband. But later when Gautama understood everything, "The sage first cursed Ahalya so that she turned into stone and remained inside the wood."[18]

Cursed Ahalya spent three hundred years as stone and later, blessed by Ramachandra, her human figure was restored. Whatever little clue is conjectured about the source of Rabindranath's poem, 'Ahalyar Prati', is not in Valmiki, but in Krittibasa. But there too, no specific hint regarding the source of the story of Ahalya can be found in the poem. It cannot be said for certain whether by 'Nirbapita

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homa sikha' the ceremony of sacrificial fire is meant or not. At the time when the earth took its shape from the nebula the burning fire, gradually cooling down, made a cover of soft soil and then the young sprouting plants and flowers appeared — this may also be the implication. This meaning also harmonizes with some expressions in the poem. The poet has described in the poem the ever-throbbing joys and sorrows, painful and joyous aspects of life in this world. Ahalya, as though, in her stony shape, kept on weaving dreams anew. Does the immobile Ahalya feel all this? She has attained a beautiful shape and the old world appears ever-green. At one place of the poem there is a suggestion of 'infertile curse' and this makes Ahalya and barren fruit and cropless earth identical. This being the main idea of the poem, it has ceased to be a part of the *Ramayana* story. It has rather turned out to be the creation of the poet's own imagination. *Ramayana's* Ahalya is not related to it. According to the poet Ahalya means an infertile land unworthy of ploughing.

Here we have an insight into a new aspect of Rabindranath's interpretation of the *Ramayana*. He has obviously turned the story of Ahalya to an allegory. A new meaning can be attached to the episode of Ahalya getting a new life by the touch of Rama's feet, if we can make it consistent with what has been said in the poem. This may mean that only with the touch of life the infertile land has become fertile. Rama is the symbol of life and life is equated with beauty and delight. The etymological meaning of Rama — derived from the verbal root 'ram' — has something to do with delightfulness, beauty, peace and ease. Rabindranath explained the word 'Rama' in the similar way in his preface to 'Rakta Karabi'. It was supported by adjectival attribution as applied to Rama in the *Ramayana*. He is like the newly sprouted bunch of green *durba* grass.[19] That Ramchandra is an allegorical symbol of the protector of the creed of agricultural cultivation and of heroism is proved by the popular description of his dark blue complexion compared with the newly sprouted bunch of green *durba* grass. He instils life into the deserted, dry Ahalya land. This meaning attached to the term 'Ahalya' cannot be deciphered anywhere in the Adi Kanda of the *Ramayana*. This meaning, infact, is attributed by Rabindranath himself. But one etymological meaning of Ahalya by the poet

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of reference in the Uttara Kanda where Ahalya's story is given in detail :' यस्या न विदते हल्यं तेनाहल्येति विश्रुता

हलं नामेह वैरूप्यं हलं तत् प्रभवं भवेत्।।"[20] 'vairupya' means 'hala' or ugliness from which comes 'halya'. That is : the woman who has no ugliness in her appearance is Ahalya. How far these meanings of the words' 'hala' and 'halya' are grammatically correct is not known to me and from this interpretation we can pass on easily to the meaning, Ahalya is an extremely beautiful woman.

The poem 'Ahalyar Prati' was written in the year 1890. From that very moment Rabindranath became curious about the allegorical meaning and then gradually became sure of it. What Rabindranath wrote after some years of its composition, on the occasion of writing the preface to Dinesh Chandra Sen's *Ramayani Katha,* contains no figurative interpretation. In 1911, on the basis of the *Ramayana,* he had explained the conflicts between the Arya and Saiva religious sects. Then it cannot be called the discernment of the figurative meaning. At best, it may be taken as a reasonable effort to sketch an account of India's social revolution on the basis of the stories found in history and mythology. But then, undoubtedly, allegory has helped in discerning historical facts. Rabindranath exactly was not the first to make such efforts. Before him, some foreign scholars, while discussing the *Ramayana*, have sometimes characterized it as an allegory and sometimes as glimpses of history. In the year 1878, the German scholar Weber's *History of Sanskrit Literature* was translated into English. Weber wrote :

> In the *Ramayana* we find ourselves from the very outset in the region of allegory; and we only move upon historical ground in so far as the allegory is applied to an historical fact, namely, to the spread of Aryan civilization towards the South, more especially to Ceylon. The characters are not historic figures, but merely personifications of certain occurrences and situations. Sita, in the first place, whose abduction by a demon and subsequent recovery by her husband Rama, constitute the plot of the entire poem, is but a fieldfurrow, to which we find divine honours paid in the songs of the 'Rick' and still more in Grihya ritual. She accordingly represents Aryan husbandry, which has to be protected by Rama — whom I regard as originally identical

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with Balaram 'halabhrit' the plough bearer.[21]

'Sita' is a Vedic word. In the *Rig Veda* she is the goddess of agriculture and in the *Ramayana* we find her being born from the ploughed furrow (halarekha). Again, Ahalya is also described as an infertile stone, a piece of land, unworthy of ploughing. Ramchandra has not only accepted Sita, a product of agriculture, he also enlivened the Ahalya land by his blessings. In both the cases there are suggestions of agriculture and crops. The interpretation that Weber applies to Rama is different from that of Rabindranath in that our poet has brought out its inner meaning, that is serenity and sweetness. Similarly the name Ravana has been interpreted by Rabindranath as one symbolizing wildness or oppression. This meaning is of course suggested in the Uttara Kanda.

यस्माल्लोकत्रायं चैतद् राविंत भयमागतम्।
तस्मात्त्वं रावणो नाम नाम्ना राजन् भविष्यसि।।
देवता मानुषा यक्षा ये चान्ये जगतीतले।
एवं त्वामभिघास्यन्ति रावणं लौकरावणम् ।।

This interpretation of Ravana's name was in currency then. The same is found in Vanaparva of the *Mahabharata* also, "रावयामास लोकान् यत् तस्माद् रावण उच्यते Again, the commentator of the *Ramayana,* Nilkantha, has attributed the same meaning.

The figurative meaning that Rabindranath has attached to the *Ramayana* in his introduction to the play *Raktakarabi* is known to all. It will be relevant to quote his observation :

> There is a terrible conflict between the agriculture-based and extortion-based civilizations. *Kaliyug is all the time exhausting the farmer's villages by dragging away men from agricultural work to that of robbery. Apart from this, the thirst and hunger, envy and malice and luxuries of the exploitation-based civilization are like those of a well-trained fiend. It can be realized through close attention that this statement of mine has been appropriated by the poet (i.e. Valmiki) disguising it with the help of allegory. The king of the golden palace, Dasanana (the ten-faced), had abducted Sita when she was

* Rabindranath coined two words, 'Karshanjivi' and 'Akarshanjivi' to mean two sets of people – one that lives on extorting the weak respectively and the other who live on agriculture.

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leaning on the bosom of fresh green *durba* grass–Rama. Is that the story of the past or the present time?

Another point is to be remembered. The episode of the illusory deer is only described in disguise to bring home the fact that in the *Tretayug* the agriculture being diverted by the Raksasa's attraction of greed is repeated covertly. It is only for the greed of the present day illusory deer of the Raksasas that the present day Sita is being trapped, otherwise, how is it that leaving the village huts, cooled in the shades of a cluster of trees, the farmers are leaving for Titagarh jute mills?

In his book *Ramayana* and *Bharat Sanskriti*, Prabodh Chandra Sen has explained in detail the allegorical significance of the epic. It need not be repeated here.

But before Rabindranath took up the matter, there was a tendency among the German scholars to view the *Ramayana* as an allegory. They mainly postulated their theory on the basis of their camparing the terms and facts in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Bankimchandra observed :

> 'The verbal roots 'ram' and 'si' are detected in the names 'Rama' and 'Sita' respectively. For this reason, *Ramayana* has turned into an agricultural allegory. Depending on such two or four verbal roots the German scholars have brushed aside all the Rigvedic hymns by attributing to the sun and clouds some allegorical colour.'[23]

It was Lassen who first started academic discussion on the *Ramayana* in Europe and suggested that the epic allegorises the spread of the Aryan civilization in Southern India. In his opinion, Rama and Sita were exiled in the Himalayas as found in the first version of the *Ramayana* and in the second version the place was changed to Godavari. The story expanded in the third version where we find Ramchandra protecting the forest sages from the atrocities of the Raksasas. Further, in the fourth version there comes the episode of Rama's Lanka expedition. Later scholars like Weber also believed in the allegorical significance of the *Ramayana*. He also

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thought like Lassen that history is blended with *Ramayana's* allegory. Jacobi also thought like them and believed that palace intrigue was the root cause of Rama's exile. What Bankimchandra said about the German scholars presenting their imaginary theory of allegory on the basis of verbal roots of certain terms is best exemplified by Jacobi's opinion. Jacobi has taken the whole *Ramayana* as an allegory of Indra-centred *Rigveda* and other stories. Besides, two opinions of Weber provoked debates and protests among scholars. One is that Rama's story originates from Dasharatha Jataka and the second is about Valmiki's debt to Homer.[24]

Rabindranath accepts some of what the scholars had ascertained about the *Ramayana*. Their main assertion is that the historical truth can be ascertained through allegory in the *Ramayana* and Rabindranath agrees with other. But that history is not as much political as it is social. The idea of statehood—even the state itself – did not develop in the time when the *Ramayana* story takes place. At that time society reigned, Aryan civilization was spreading and Brahmins and Kshatriyas and other social sects were at war with one another for supremacy. Indeed, these are the ingredients the Ramayana age is composed of. Rabindranath nursed the belief that there are hidden references to history in the *Ramayana*. In his essay on 'Bharatvarshe Itihaser Dhara' (1911) he discusses the main subject-matter of the *Ramayana* story—the gradual spread of Aryan civilization in the south and its conflict with the material wealth of the Dravidian civilization. Apart from some stray remarks on different topics, his two essays are worth mentioning : One is 'Sahitya Sristi' (1907) and the other 'Bharatbarshe Itihaser Dhara' (1911). The gap between two essays is four years. The seed of the first essay was sprouted through the second one. He depends mainly on the *Ramayana* while citing instances for establishing the fact that there is an inseparable relationship between literary creativity and life and society. Many myths were in currency about Rama in the country before this epic came into being in manuscript form. He had no doubt whatsoever that there was an indication of the *Ramayana* in these myths, though they were now missing. ("A popular belief in regard to Ramachandra was doubtless current in the country even before the *Ramayana* was composed.") Rabindranath thought that there was surely a remark-

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able hero called Rama who was worth remembering by all. Because of his outstanding achievements verses were also written about him. A poet in the later times must have given a poetical shape to that song of praise. This theory of origin about the composition of the *Ramayana* is of course corroborated by historians. But to Rabindranath it was a historical fact which was described through allegory, though there are different opinions as to whether all the achievements of Ramachandra are true or not. It was Lassen who first said that the Aryan civilization spread due to Ramachandra's journey to the south. The Aryan civilization was then agriculture-oriented. Further, there must have been some basis about the hearsay regarding 'Swarna Lanka Puri' (the golden palace of Lanka). This anthropophagous race of India was not uncivilized. They were rather better than the Aryans in terms of artistic luxuries.[25]

Rabindranath did not mention a certain probable historical truth in his essay 'Sahitya Sristi', but he has done that in 'Bharatvarse Itihaser Dhara'. He did neither throw any hint in 'Sahitya Sristi' in regard to the quarrel between Vasistha and Viswamitra being the allegory of the quarrel between Brahmins and Kshatriyas nor did he try to establish that the breaking of 'Haradhanu' (Shiva's bow) signified the demolition of the pride of the worshippers of Shiva. Also, there is no hint in that essay to the effect that in these very stories and pictures the history of India's social revolution is concealed. He did it later. In this conjecture of Rabindranath we get a glimpse of the poet's insight. The earlier scholars did not of course consider this aspect. It has also been hinted at by Rabindranath that there might be a palace-intrigue connected with sending of Ramchandra to exile and with Brahmin Kshatriya disputes. Rabindranath implicitly observes :

> Perhaps a conflict between the two powerful forces is indicated by the obstruction that came in the way of Ramachandra's installation to the throne in the event of his exile. The party that worked against the interests of Ramachandra was undoubtedly very strong and it had a great impact on the ladies dwelling inside the palace. The old Dasharatha could not ignore this fact. This is why he was forced to send his dearest heroic son to exile most unwillingly.[26] Jacobi had already hinted at this conspiracy be-

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fore. A fact that can be especially referred to here in this context is that the manner in which Rabindranath has explained the sequences of events in the *Ramayana* clearly shows his real historical outlook. The history of ancient India that we know today is mainly based on the Vedas, the mythologies, stone inscriptions and coins. History had to be written by relating the justifiable conjectures to the facts as general truth. It is known to everybody that the evidences about Mohenjodaro are taken that way. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were written in the post Vedic age. There is no contemporary socio-political history available. Because there is no other sources to fall back upon, the historians use the stories in the epics as far as possible in their efforts to write a coherent social history of the time. The Western historians have written historical accounts using many stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* taking them to be allegory of historical facts till the contrary facts were presented to demolish the conjectural accounts.

It was both advantageous and disadvantageous to Rabindranath to ascertain historical significance of the epic stories, for, after all, he was a poet. His imaginative power helped him, but there was also the risk of his imagination crossing the limits of logic. But a wonderful restraint contained his imaginative flights to reasonable premises and this helped him in indicating the currents of Indian history. Rabindranath has not only interpreted the *Ramayana* from aesthetic and indicational standpoints, but he has also a rational explanation to offer. It seems he was benefited by the discussion of the *Ramayana* by his predecessors.

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## *Notes and References*

1. 'Kumar Sambhab O Sakuntala', (1901), *Prachin Sahitya*
2. 'Ramayana', (1903) *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Raghuvansha*, Part 10, Sloka 33.
5. *Ibid*, Part 13, Sloka 1.
6. *Mahabharata*, Canto 'Shanti', 339/85.
   सन्ध्यांशे समनुप्राप्ते त्रेताया द्वापरस्य च।
   अहं दाशरथी रामो भविष्यामि जगत्पतिः।।
7. Albert Weber, *The History of Indian Literature*, 2nd ed. 1875. Translated into English 1878, p. 194.
8. 'Sahitya Sristi', (1907) *Sahitya*.
9. 'Kadambari Chitra', (1899) *Prachin Sahitya*.
10. Dineshchandra Sen, *The Bengali Ramayana*, 1920, pp. 55-58.
11. 'Sahityer Matra' (1933), *Sahityer Swarup*.
12. 'KavyerUpekshita' (1900), *Prachin Sahitya*
13. Aranya Kanda, Part 18, Sloka 3, Winternitz thinks that this sloka is interpolated. See *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. 1, 1927, p. 487.
14. Bhavabhuti perhaps got the matter for 'Alekhya-darshan' from Kalidasa. See Raghuvamsha:
    तयोर्यथाप्रार्थितमिन्द्रियार्थानासेदुषोः सचसु चित्रावतसु।
    प्राप्तानि दुःखान्यपि दण्डकेषु सञ्चिन्त्यमानानि सुखान्यभूवन्।।
15. Winternitz's statement may be referred to :
    There can be no doubt that the whole of Book VII of the Ramayana was added later to the work; but it has also long been recognized that the whole of Book I cannot have belonged to the original work of Valmiki. Not only are there numerous internal contradictions in the book but the language and styles too, stand out as inferior to those of Books II to VI. Moreover, in the genuine parts of the poem there is never any reference to the events in Book I. In fact there are details in this book which directly contradict the statements of the later books. *Ibid.* pp. 495-496.
16. This episode occurs in the Tirthayatra parvan of Vana parva of the Mahabharata also. The relevance of this episode is not that much to the *Mahabharata* as it is to the *Ramayana*. The introduction of this prologue in the *Ramayana* is for the purpose of Dasharatha bringing Rishyasrhinga as one desirous of son. There is no mention of Dasharatha in the *Mahabharata*, neither was there any necessity at that time. It was during the travel of the Pandavas in the context of a place that Rishyashringa was also brought in the picture and the earlier story has been

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remembered. What is just an old story in the *Mahabharata* becomes contemporary with Dasharatha. This may lead us to think that the *Ramayana* was written before the *Mahabharata*.

17. *Valmiki Ramayana*, Uttara Kanda, Canto 30.

18. *Krittibasi Ramayana*, ed. Sukhamoy Mukhopadhyaya, 1981, p. 19. This well-known anecdote is not there in *Krittibasi Ramayana*, edited by Ramananda Chattopadhyaya.

19. 'Bharatbarshiya Bibaha,' (1925), *Samaj*.

20. This meaning is not given in Apte's Dictionary. This meaning has been indicated by Haricharan Bandyopadhyaya (Vangiya Sabdakosha) by quoting this sentence from the Uttara Kanda. In this context it may be remembered that while writing the essay *'Bharatbarshe Itihaser Dhara'* (1911), Rabindranath interpreted the significance of the term Ahalya as somebody who is not ploughable, that is one who is stony.

21. Weber, *The History of Indian Literature* (translation 1878), p. 192

22. *Valmiki Ramayana*, Uttara Kanda, 16/37-38.

23. *Krishna Charitra*, Part I, Chapter V I

24. This controversy was again raised after a long time. Camil Bulke has doubtlessly indicated in his Hindi work 'Ram Katha' that Dasaratha Jatak was composed after the *Ramayana*. Though the view that Valmiki was indebted to Homer has been rejected by some eminent scholars, Sunitikumar Chattopadhyaya had of late reiterated his acceptance of this view.

25. 'Sahityasristhi' *Sahitya*. Dravidian civilization was industry-oriented. On the other hand Aryan civilization was agriculture-based. This view is in vogue among the scholars.

26. See *'Bharatbarshe Itihaser Dhara'*.

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## ON THE MAHABHARATA

Rabindranath never wrote any exclusive article on the *Mahabharata*. Even the bunch of articles that he wrote on Sanskrit literature in "Prachin Sahitya", do not contain any independent essay on the *Mahabharata*. Some discussions of the *Mahabharata* are found in his book "Adhunik Sahitya"[1] that evolves out of the criticism of Bankim Chandra's "Krishna Charitra". Of course such contextual discussions on the *Mahabharata* can be traced in various prose writings of the poet. It is curious that though he refrained from writing any exclusive article on the *Mahabharata* yet the poet composed no less than five verse-dramas based on themes borrowed from it such as *Chitrangada* (1891), *Vidaya Abhishap* (1894), *Gandharir Avedan* (1897), *Narakbas* (1897), and *Karna-Kunti Samvad* (1899). On the other hand he borrowed the themes of only three of his poems from the *Ramayana*. Those are 'Ahalyar Prati', 'Bhasha O Chhanda' and 'Patita'. The story of 'Patita' may also be found in the *Mahabharata*. Still Rabindranath wrote an extensive essay on the *Ramayana* in the form of a preface to Dineshchandra Sen's 'Ramayani katha' and that has been included in the book "Prachin Sahitya".

We all know of Rabindranath's deep regard and love for the *Ramayana*. This emanated from his special fascination for the moral or ethical ideal that the *Ramayana* embodies. That apart Rabindranath was drawn to the *Ramayana* through Valmiki's (the first poet on record) artistic creation of the saga of the epic. Valmiki is regarded as the first of our poets as the *Ramayana* heralded the advent of a poet of art. The uniqueness of the *Ramayana* is imbedded in the description of its main story which Valmiki spread through the six cantos excluding the Uttarkanda which Rabindranath knew to be a later addition. The poet was also aware of the artistic beauty of the *Ramayana* through its thematic unity as well as the delicate expansion of its story element and expressed it uniquely in his symbolic play *Raktakarabi* (The Red Oleander). The theme

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the great epic recur in many of Rabindranath's writings and he felt that there existed a great difference between the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* with regard to their intensions and purpose. He said :

> The uniqueness of the *Ramayana* is that it elaborates the age-old family saga of man. The religious as also the love and reverential bondage in the relationship between father and son, brother and brother, husband and wife have been so glorified in the *Ramayana,* that they have naturally become the befitting themes of an epic. The conquest of countries, annihilation of enemies, the violent clashes between these two opposing forces build up the gripping interest in the *Ramayana.* But interestingly the main attractive feature of the *Ramayana* is the conjugal love between Rama and Sita which is brightened through the battle between Rama and Ravana.[2]

The *Mahabharata* depicts a different literary taste. True, it also depicts the earthly bondage between father, son, mother, wife, friend, preceptor and disciple but that does not draw its readers to it. There exists a different feeling arising out of fate, destiny, consequences of man's deeds, death, observance of religious rites surpassing numerous stories, characters and events that stay on in the minds of the readers of the *Mahabharata.* In the essay "Arogya" included in the "Kalantar" Rabindranath says :

> The major part of the legendary theme of the *Mahabharata* is occupied by the description of battles but those do not account for the consequences in the end. Lost wealth reclaimed through a bloodbath does not ultimately make the Pandavas exultant. On the other hand the conquering Pandavas march towards the path of total renunciation leaving the conquered wealth near the ashes of the funeral pyres of the Kurukshetra. That indeed is the ultimate message of the great epic.[3]

Any attempt to understand Rabindranath's feelings for either the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* is bound to bring in contextual discussions of one for the other. The reason behind such an eventuality is that the Indians react almost the same way on their readings of the epics independent of their different patterns of origins and the poet cannot isolate the epics while evaluating one or the other.

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Vyasa and Valmiki are not really the names of two persons. The nomenclature came into existence merely to give a name to an object in view. The two great epics of India have eclipsed their poet-composers behind the great mass of creation itself.[4]

The history of the origins of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* accounts for an endless debate among scholars. It is generally accepted that the epics were not composed at any particular juncture of time by any single poet. The main theme of the *Mahabharata*—the conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas—is age-old. The events of many past ages as depicted in the popular sagas of north India have been interwoven in the exemplary theme of the *Mahabharata*. Thus domestic strife of that epic is not alien to man's day-to-day existence and as such an admixture of all such details have been added to the complexity of the *Mahabharata*. Still it must be kept in mind that stories centering around domestic strifes issued out of the whirlwind of life through the ages and as such could alter the main course of the themetic story of the *Mahabharata* themselves without being mere appendages of the epic. So says the expert :

> The first impression a critical reader would get from the *Mahabharata* is that, it is not the composition of a single author, nor even of those of one generation; he soon notices that it is an assemblage of heterogeneous elements—a compilation involving many authors of varying abilities, who added a considerable amount of adventitious matter to the original epic nucleus from time to time. The great epic in the present form is the outcome of a long and continuous literary activity.[5]

Rabindranath also endorsed this opinion with regard to the origin of the *Mahabharata*. In his essay "Visvavidyalayer Rup" (1932) he says :

> The *Mahabharata* integrated the history and the thought current of the ages that flowed through India. Its language recalls the era of Vedavyasa and the period of the *Mahabharata* itself. The scattered wealth of thought, historical sagas that had almost faded in the far horizon needed to be codified in India. The country thus intended to weave the torn and lost beaded wealth of thought to be dedicated to people of successive generations

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for their use. In fact the country wanted to establish its own living image in the society permanently. Such an attempt had within itself an incessant zeal, an untiring sadhana and an all-compassing outlook. The name *Mahabharata* embodies all such noble attitudes and it emanated from them who conceived the bright image of India's mental wealth in their meditations. That is both the geographical and spiritual entity of India at the same instant. The thinkers conceived the spiritual wealth of India on their own mental screens.

The concept of Rabindranath with regard to the *Mahabharata* thus encompasses the whole make-up of the mental plain of the Indians which the historians fail to focus. What the historians speak through facts Rabindranath does with literary flavour. The process of the advent of *Mahabharata* was thus discussed in the nineteenth century by scholars like Weber that was criticised by Bankimchandra in his book *Krishnacharitra* (2nd ed. 1892). Rabindranath published his discussion of *Krishnacharitra* in *Sadhana* (Phalgun 1301) and there one can partially gather his concept of the *Mahabharata* as he confines himself mainly to the criticism of Bankimchandra's Krishnacharitra. Even there he says," It can be admitted that the *Mahabharata* consists of writings of different writers at different times in history". To quote Rabindranath further

> Bankimbabu endeavours to show that the original *Mahabharata* of the poet Vyasa does not exist at present. The *Mahabharata* available now passed from Vyas to Vaishampayan, from Vaisampayan to the father of Ugrasraba, from his father to Ugrasraba and finally collected by some other poet thereafter. Secondly writings of many people have come to stay in the *Mahabharata* through the ages and a reliable methodology has yet to be evolved for separating those diverse pieces of compositions. Thirdly there is no way to prove the historicity of the *Mahabharata* through comparison with other ancient texts.[6]

It is presumed that Rabindranath formed his ideas regarding the advent of the *Mahabharata* from this period of time and found no reason to change that view later. From this time it was stamped in the mind of the poet that the *Mahabharata* has no historicity but contains numerous historical clues in it. Convinced of the epic's

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literary quality Rabindranath said,

> Bankimchandra wants to term the *Mahabharata* as a poetic history but we say that it is a historical poetic composition.[7]

As such the poetry of the epic is more important to Rabindranath than the historical facts it embodies. True the greatness of the *Mahabharata* lies in its poetry than in its historicity which Rabindranath explained as an embodiment of eternal truth in contrast to the factual details of history of a particular period of time. To quote the poet

> Truth is far more widespread than mere facts. Many a time truth has to be salvaged from heaps of facts through the faculty of imagination which lie as dry firewood in history but truth shines in poetical works through the genius of the poet composers.[8]

Rabindranath in fact did not overlook the historical facts of the *Mahabharata*. He rather tried to explain the historicity of the events described in the epic, mixing logic with imagination. Such an attempt is not accepted to any wise modern historian who would feel that logic behind facts gets weakened if imagination is brought to play. As such modern historians prefer to confine themselves to bare facts alone in contrast to the nineteenth century scholars like Weber, Lassen and others, who built up their views with a few facts colouring those with profuse imagination. Thus the German scholars who turned the *Ramayana* into an allegory of agriculture. Such an explanation has been possible as the names Rama and Sita contain *ram* and *si*-verb roots. Even Rabindranath has also explained the *Ramayana* in a like manner. He termed Ravana as a replica of scream or unrest deriving it from the causative form of the root *rav*.

Rabindranath forwarded an original explanation in the course of Indian history on the basis of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In so doing he did not treat the epics exactly as allegories. In his essay "Bharatbarshe Itihaser Dhara" published in the *Prabasi* he analysed the stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Puranas* to bring out their social relevance in terms of the post-Buddha period. The poet in trying to establish the real shape of history interpreted the clashes between different gods in ancient India as actually symbolising the clashes between different sects. Referring to his endeavour as such the poet said

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> Let not anyone think of our discussions on the *Mahabharata* as confined to any particular period of time. It is free from the shackles of time.

Elsewhere he said earlier that the stories of the *Mahabharata* are scattered popular tales of centuries. Unambiguously he says that when Buddhism was disintegrating the ancient Vedic religion the Shakas, Huns and such other foreign non-Aryans created a state of inequilibrium in the social structure of India. As a result Indian Aryanism tried to discover itself anew. In the popular Aryan sagas India found its own geographical entity in the boundaries of the empire of a conquering monarch and then efforts were initiated to weave the storm-tossed and scattered social entities. That symbolically represented the cultural heritage of the country. The poet said, the Vyasas of that age was far more busy collecting ancient sagas without attempting to create anything new. Such a Vyasa might not have been one person but was certainly a social force. Thus Rabindranath did not mark Vyasa as a person but as the symbol of a particular social tendency. The poet further says referring to Vyasa,

> He collected all the hearsays of the Aryan society. Not only hearsay but all accepted beliefs, altercations and characteristic qualities of characters were collected together to build a distinctive image of an entire nation. That summarily is the *Mahabharata.* The name itself focuses the unified image of the Aryan nation and though it does not strictly conform to the modern definition of history yet it is the history of the Indian Aryans.[9]

Such a collection is the *Mahabharata* but it is not just a collection alone. It embodies what Rabindranath deduced as a unity in diversity. The sagas are indicators of diverse conflicts governing man's existence and collectively point as a torch light to the ultimate human goal embodied in the Gita. Rabindranath was conscious of the fact that western scholars perceived an inconsistency of logic in the epic. The Gita's attempts consciously to codify Sankhaya, Yoga and Vedanta were unacceptable to Western scholars but Rabindranath perceived the mark of an underlying unity in such an attempt itself. The Gita, criticises yajna and speaks of Bhakti and Yogas. Such diverse discussions point towards the fulfilment of human life

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striving to reach its ultimate goal through conflicting situations.

Much later the poet's essay "A Vision of India's History" makes an attempt to explain allegories calling the marksmanship of Arjuna as a display of Yogic feats,

> The trial is obviously of a spiritual nature. The fixed centre of Truth in the heart of the revolving wheel of the world (Samsara) is reflected in the depth of our own being, which can be reached by the one pointed concentration of yoga. Is not this the doctrine of the Gita in the language of a picture?

It must naturally be admitted that in an epic like the *Mahabharata* where at least the geographical references are real, many of the events mentioned had their origins far back in the history of time. But Rabindranath interpreted the Ramayanic conflict between Viswamitra and Vasistha and the conflict between the Pandavas and Kauravas enriched by the counsels of Lord Krishna, as symbols of the historical social mobility of ancient times which point more to the changing nature of the society than a mere archaelogical history. That makes the poet accept the *Mahabharata* as a historical poetic composition and not merely a piece of poetical history. It would be fruitful to see how the poet assessed the poetical aesthetic aspect of the epic. In his essay "Sahityer Matra" (1933) included in the book *Sahityer Swarup* the poet says,

> The *Mahabharata* had fallen in the hands of diverse people at different points of time which accounted for unnecessary onslaught on its literary quality but such attempts failed due mainly to its solid structure.[10]

The poet maintained that such a structure speaks of the craftmanship of the epic's delicate composition. He did not separately discuss that aspect of the *Mahabharata* as he refrained from the accepted customary practices of the literary critics. Our ancient critics has defined the epic outlining its structural composition. Aristotle too has said much on the subject. Rabindranath did not conceive of the structure of an epic following such discussions. All literary works have a self-styled way of their expressions which in English is termed "form". That is referred to as structure by Rabindranath, which has the quality of being, unique and absolute. The definition of an epic which texts of rhetoric indicate is not adequate for an epic.

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like the *Mahabharata*. Of the two western concepts, epic of growth and epic of art, *Mahabharata* conforms to the former but its vastness and depth far surpass all existing classifications of epics. Those two aspects of vastness and depth have contributed to the acceptance of many didactic and such other anecdotes into the main stream of the story of the *Mahabharata*. Had the *Mahabharata* been shaped in the model of a modern singularly unified plot of a play or a novel or a short story then such additions of stories would not have been possible. Indeed the complexity of the *Mahabharata* is unique in itself without any parallel in all literary genres.

Rabindranath mentioned one characteristic of ancient Indian classics. The literary creations in Sanskrit literature do not show any comprehensive singularity of approach. He perceived that in description and discussion of facts an amount of extravagant approach often break the flow of stories in Sanskrit literature that fail to disturb the serenity of the Indian mind.[11] Such diverse story elements need not be examined either as integral part of the main story of any ancient classic or as something superimposed thereon. If the readers of such classics had failed to accept such break-away of stories then those would not have stayed on for ever. No one can possibly deny the greatness of the Gita but to hear it entirely and patiently right at the very moment of the start of the Kurukshetra battle is possible in India alone. There's no hurry to reach the end of the story. India engrossed in thoughts and metaphysical speculations is not tired of encompassing seven large cantos and eighteen divisive parts of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Such attitudinal behaviour is typically Indian and cannot be seen in any other countries of the world. Rabindranath is here pointing to a typicality that rests with the epics which correspond to what he termed as structure. The vastness of the story of the *Mahabharata* which is slow-moving and loosely connected is unacceptable to the western scholars as the pattern does not conform to the dictum of the essential unity of time, place and action. European literary works are guided by the discipline of those unities in contrast to the leisurely approach of the stories of the great Indian epics ideally suited to the dictum of Sanskrit literature.

The uniqueness of the epic stories thus pointed out by Rabindranath

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need not be judged either as a qualification or a disqualification of the epics as that itself accounts for the backbone of their creations and the readers enjoyed it through the ages. The poet has pointed out another excellence of the literary genre of Sanskrit with reference to Kalidasa's *Meghadoot*. The diversion of Purba Megha (earlier part) and Uttar Megha (later part) shows the transition from the human world to the eternal world of aesthetic beauty. In modern times we term 'Purba Megha' as depicting reality and the 'Uttar Megha' as a world of dreams in contrast to the former. It is here that Rabindranath shows the limitations of the European writers who are mostly confined in depicting reality alone. As such the European writers would have drawn the curtain on the Shakuntala story when Dushmanta realised his mistake looking at the ring retrieved from a fisherman. On the other hand Kalidasa in defiance of Western dramatical concepts, extended his story to include the sudden reunion of Shakuntala and Dushmanta on the latter's return from heaven.

Following the above idea Rabindranath has drawn a parallel between Kalidasa's story and the conceptual make-up of the *Mahabharata*. In conflict exist the two tiers—the enjoyment of and the passing over the human life. The intense conflict drawn around the dictum of not allowing even a needle point of land *(Suchyagra medini)* ends up in total renunciation at its end in the *Mahabharata*. To go forward in the life's journey leaving behind sorrows sufferings as well as the worldly comfort and to seek the ultimate truth at the journey's end are the last fulfilment of human life.Thus the poet of the *Mahabharata* concluded his work.

Rabindranath observed:

> That acceptance of the principle of renunciation of all wordly comforts marks the journey of man from the life of reality to the life of eternal in the *Mahabharata* where worldly actions are shadowed by renunciation itself. Work itself is not its own reward. In the midst of all valour, jealousy, revenge, endeavour and attainment rises the tune of a dirge from the crematorium, symbolic of man's last journey beyond life. In the same way Kalidasa depicts how enjoyment and renunciation co-exist in life stirred with sensuous beauty. If the *Mahabharata* can be

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termed as a poem depicting action and renunciation at the same-time, then Kalidasa can be called the poet of aesthetic enjoyment and renunciation of all such worldly enjoyments.[12]

Actually in the *Mahabharata* the message of renunciation is not heard in the beginning of hectic worldly activities but in the end, in the *Shanti and Anusasan Parva*. It is as if, Rabindranath says,

We journey from the Purba Megha to the Uttar Megha and therein lies the ultimate attainment of heavenly bliss in the *Mahabharata*.

The poet of the *Mahabharata* does not end his story at the expected moment but breaks it like a doll's shouse through such contrasted pictures of the great Arjuna unable to lift his bow the Gandiva and being helplessly overpowered by plunderers of the women who had been so long sheltered by Lord Krishna. Rabindranath terms this as "Arjuna's humiliation".[13] Such a turn of the story only shows the peculiarity of the Indian mind and that we term it as humiliation shows how we are carried away by the Western world of thought.

From the standpoint of literature the *Mahabharata* is unique in its creations of various characters and Rabindranath described the epic as a "gallery of characters". The epic contains countless characters other than the main characters which cannot be confined to any set of patterned activities. The highest idealistic standpoint and the lowest behavioural pattern of activities of those characters have all been expanded through small stories. Rabindranath commented on some main characters being struck by wonderful human complexities that are perceived in them. The poet objected to Bankimchandra's efforts to establish the excellence of the character of Krishna in conformity to some of his own ideal imaginative values. He felt that though Bankimchandra depicted Krishna as a man, yet a man could never be marked so ideally. There lay his objection to Bankimchandra's *Krishna Charitra* as Krishna of the *Mahabharata* is perhaps neither a god nor a person with harmonious development of the faculties of the mind. He is Krishna and none else. Rabindranath perhaps wanted to concentrate on the literary success in creating the character of Krishna overlooking Bankimchandra's research inclined explanation of the same. He is

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used to accept Krishna as a human being and not as a god. The attempt to cover up the vices and qualities of the character of Krishna imposing a godhood on it was to the poet detrimental to the literary greatness of it. Surpassing Bankimchandra's attempt to establish the historicity of the character of Krishna Rabindranath tried to establish it as a poetic creation of an ideal human character. To a certain poet of bygone days the ideal of nobility was exceptionally high and that was expressed in the character of Krishna. That accounted for the description of the battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas for upholding the culture of work and worship. Krishna, Arjuna, Bhishma, Bhima, Karna, Drona are fine examples of champions of the ideal of work and worship. That applies to Gandhari and Draupadi as well for their unique exhibition of devotion and duty. In this connection Rabindranath has expounded a deep subtlety in the imaginative creations of characters. Such on imaginative genius is rarely seen elsewhere. The poet maintained that the creator of the *Mahabharata* did never create human characters which are either personification of some metaphysical truth or ethical principles. As such the base deeds performed by some great characters of the *Mahabharata* could hardly be conceived by lesser poets. The great creator of the epic poetry did not follow a set pattern for his character creation. The mystery of human heart is too deep. How deep is the complexity of man's mysterious make-up of the mind and heart is aptly expressed by Bhisma in the Shantiparva—

"गुह्यं ब्रह्म तदिदं वो ब्रवीमि
न मानुषाच्छ्रेष्ठतरं हि किञ्चित्।।

"Let me tell you a hidden truth : there is nothing greater than man".

Rabindranath perceived that very greatness of humanity in the *Mahabharata* in place of the divine activities of godhood. Such people are human with both vices and good qualities but not commonplace like us. Rabindranath perceived that the poet of the *Mahabharata* created a heroic society. People of that society had among them a bigger harmony but no narrow adjustment. Opposites of life in matters of objects, events and habits account for an overall harmony of humanity. We cannot judge them through set reasons merely.

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The poet said by way of illustration, "None has so far been able to discover the aptness of the character of Hamlet satisfactorily but none has doubted that such a character is a natural creation in the realm of literature."[15]

That opinion of Rabindranath is unparalleled in literary criticism. That uniqueness in creations of characters of Shakespeare has always impressed critcs of all ages. What Theodore Watts-Dunton, a nineteenth century critic, termed as the poet's absolute vision corroborates Rabindranath's opinion with regard to such poetic creation. If Theodore Watts-Dunton had read the *Mahabharata* then he perhaps would have compared Vyasa with Homer, Chaucer and Shakespeare. Rabindranath has many a time preferred Bhima and Karna to Bhisma. Such an opinion of Rabindranath speaks of his highest regard for objective sincerity of the poet of the *Mahabharata* although he was a lyric poet himself. That kind of appreciation for objectivity could come in spite of his lyric inclinations. At the same moment his mind was attracted to not so significant characters and their pangs. In his essay *Manushya* the *Panchabhuta* he speaks of a downtrodden character as no less important than the nobility of Bhisma, Drona, Bhima and Arjuna. That apart, it may be proved how the poet was inspired in his own creations by the range of the imagination of the poet of the *Mahabharata.* As such he adopted the stories "Chitrangada", "Gandharir Avedan", "Karna Kunti Sambad," "Narakbas" and "Vidaya Abhishapa" from the *Mahabharata* itself. Even the poem 'Patita' was conceived in the same way from the Vanaparva of the *Mahabharata* though its roots stretch to the story of Rishyashringa as depicted in the Valakanda of the *Ramayana.*

As our discussions centre round the *Mahabharata* in the eyes of Rabindranath, the question may be raised with regard to the aptness of the poems under reference to his own ideas. Let us remember that Rabindranath has commented on the entire compass of the *Mahabharata* at different places and not on parts of the epic. It would be worthwhile to explore how the poet suggested the entirety of the epic in such fragmentary episodes which he depicted in his own way instead of how he presented the stories of the epic unaltered.

Rabindranath voices his purpose and inspiration for creating his

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poetic drama *Chitrangada* in its very preface. Ugly Chitrangada when changed to a beautiful woman realized that the change was external. If she possessed strength of character then its disenchanted force would be a boon for her lover and support their united life towards its onward march. In such a charitable act of giving lies the everlasting identity of the soul. When such an idea occurred in the mind of the poet, the story of Chitrangada was conceived. In a bid to illustrate his thought he imagined the Manipuri Princess as ugly. The story itself has very briefly been told in the *Mahabharata* through only fifteen slokas.[16] There Chitrangada is a beautiful person shorn of all theoretical ideas. The story in the *Mahabharata* has been enacted to illustrate the valour of Arjuna's character and for no purpose of Chitrangada herself. Thus the poet created his Chitrangada according to his own imaginative set of values in contrast to the practice followed by the creator of the Mahabharata. Curiously enough that such an inclination to adhere to imaginative conception of life does not suit an epic poet has been hinted by Rabindranath himself in connection with his discussions of the character of Krishna. The genius of the epic poet makes him see the world objectively.

The same tendency of the creative urge on the part of Rabindranath is seen in his 'Vidaya Abhishap' the story of which like that of Chitrangada has been narrated through only twenty-three slokas in Yayati-fable of the Adiparva. Kach on his way to heaven endowed with the art of rejuvenation from Guru Shukra is offered love by Devayani. Kach is god-sent and dutifully rejects the love of Devayani as self-enjoyment of anything is detrimental to his mission of duty. Such a story prompted Rabindranath to evolve many theories on different occasions. He analysed the theory embodying a man's sincerity and a woman's unrestrained emotion of love (generated in the heart) and explained its significance in the essay *Kabyer Tatparya* included in the *Panchabhut*.

It must be remembered that the excellence of the poems of Rabindranath is due not only to their thought-content but to the extraordinary delicacy and beauty of expression. When the poet of the *Mahabharata* is engrossed in the contemplation of human life his expression lacks the delicacy of art. Any lyric is unique in

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creation of beauty and in such a creation the form becomes the reflection of the idea of the poet. That is not the creed of an epic poet. As such when Rabindranath is prompted to create any literary piece following a story of the *Mahabharata* he does so according to his own poetic creed without the depth and vastness of the epic itself. But none can doubt that those creations fully engross the readers through their poetic beauty. The poem *Patita* based on the fable of Rishyashringa of the *Mahabharata* shows delicacy of expression but the main character is not more human than a replica of the poet's imaginative ideas alone.

The above cannot be said about the poems "Karna Kunti Samvad" and "Gandharir Avedan" where the tragic appeal of the character of Karna and the faithful religiosity of Gandhari come independently with full imaginative vitality from the *Mahabharata* itself without an extra effort to beautify it. For Karna has its own appeal to readers of all times. In a letter of 7 Jaistha 1306 (ie 1899) to his friend Rabindranath, Jagadishchandra Basu wrote :

> Once I requested to write about Karna for we are moved by the godlike character of Bhisma but are in sympathy with both the shortcomings and qualities of Karna. A man whose life was an intense conflict between nobility and crookedness, bright even in defeat capable of becoming a god could easily attract all attention to itself.[17]

It was at this time (1899) that Rabindranath composed *Karna-Kunti Sambad*.[18] One must note that Karna remained a mockery of destiny throughout his life which creates a sympathy in the minds of readers. Rabindranath intensifies the painful encounter of Karna and Kunti just before the start of the Kurukshetra battle. There can be no doubt about the intensely tragic nature of that encounter. Recounting the entire past life of Karna the poet brings alive the tragedy of his very existence. The root story of the encounter of Karna with Kunti in the *Mahabharata* does not recapitulate the past events to be fitted into the descriptive pattern of the epic which Rabindranath utilizes for building the tragic impact of his poem recounting the pangs of Karna's pitiable existence. In this case it is unlikely that Rabindranath started with any preplanned pattern for depicting the life of Karna which came alive through the tragic

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events of his life itself.

The question remains if Karna of the *Mahabharata* has been justly portrayed by Rabindranath. Karna of the *Mahabharata* is endowed with a perceptible ruggedness in his character as a mark of his individuality like that of Duryodhana. Still the ruggedness of the two characters is different, bearing testimony to the power of creating individual character which the poet of the *Mahabharata* possessed. On the other hand Rabindranath's Karna is pathetic endowed with a mind thoughtful, dreamy and soft. Rabindranath created Karna as a man dying to compensate for want of motherly affection in contrast to the rugged character depicted in the *Mahabharata*. That is Karna of *Karna-Kunti Sambad* which if judged on its own merit is a separate lovable entity. It is futile to ask why should Karna aspire for the love of an unknown mother when he knew Radha as his mother from the very childhood.

In contrast to the story of Karna the story of Rabindranath's poetical composition "Narakbas" is closer to the *Mahabharata*.[19] The age-old king Somak sacrificing his only son at the instance of Ritwick with the hope of having a hundred sons was entitled to enjoy eternal bliss in the heaven which he refused and embraced the pangs of hell along with his priest Ritwick voluntarily. Noting such diverse story elements Rabindranath remained reverentially appreciative of the creative genius of the poet of the *Mahabharata* admitting that no other poet would ever dare to portray such an array of characters and incidents spread through an expansive canvas. The monstrosity apparent in such a creation has an effect of infatuation on the minds of the readers who are storm-tossed on the crests and troughs of the conflicting forces of action, reaction, sin, bliss, destiny as also the fruits of honest and evil deeds. Thoughts of probability, improbability, reality and unreality do not influence the readers. But the poetic compositions of Rabindranath based on the *Mahabharata* creates a different impression. There the concept of morality comes up towering above all other considerations. In his dramatic composition *Visarjan* too Rabindranath has upheld human and behavioural morality. 'Narakbas' has mainly been composed centering on the question of justifiability of human behaviour. But he felt that the universal law of humanity was far greater than

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ordinary morality. Indeed words of ethical significance fail to justify the ways of human life.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna urges Arjuna to go beyond all maxims of morality, that which is beyond good and evil. "Sadasat tatparam yat", showing him that form which reflected the entire universe where life, death, morality and immorality are dissolved to fade away in a void. What is expressed in the Gita is expansively focussed throughout the entire length of the *Mahabharata.* But we cannot do away with morality and immorality in our fragmentary life for safeguarding our mundane and social existence. Still such maxims of morality do not hold good for all times to come as those do not fit in for all needs of life. Who can pronounce maxims of morality that would answer all needs of all times to come? Who has ever seen eternity as to be able to judge what would be eternal values for the ever-changing social existence of man?

Ramendrasunder Trivedi has expressed his views with regard to the above :

> That destiny which has put in the planets and stars of the solar system in their fixed orbits is the same which controls days, nights, different seasons, rains, storms, earthquakes and cyclones. Similarly it is the same destiny which prompts man to perform good or bad deeds and accounts for Siddharta's renunciation of worldly life as also the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Thus destiny split into different sectors of the existence of the very universe is one and the same and it may be termed the Supreme Being or God".[20]

That Supreme Being of the *Mahabharata* is Dharma (eternal religion) and the reference to that porvades the epic. Bhisma, Drona and such other Kuru elders have failed to find solutions to several problems as popular maxims of duties and moralities do not fit into many of their queries which made Bhisma say that "Dharma and its maxims are cavedeep" घमश्र शत्वं निहितं गुहायाम्" and none knows the implications of those. Rabindranath traced that inner theme of the *Mahabharata* in his poem, "Gandharir Avedan" as Gandhari alone knew the deeper meaning of Dharma.[21] Duryodhana followed the dharma of king, Dhritarastra was engrossed in the dharma of a father and Bhanumati followed the dharma of her family but their dharmas

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were fragmentary . Only Gandhari realized the Truth and stood constantly firm in quest of the eternal religious consciousness which she termed as dark hour capable of correcting the broken conceptions of dharma leading to its fullest manifestation. She first appealed to Dhritarastra, but in vain. Then she marked how her son was firm in his concepts of kingly virtues that rather accounted for disunity and not unity. That was against Gandhari's own concept of eternal religion. Hence she waited for time to heal all misconceptions of religion in such words as

O my unstable heart, be at peace.
Humbly submit to the inevitable patiently.
When freshly awakened time wakes
Up after a long night to correct itself,
That is indeed a day of intense sorrow.

That made Gandhari say "Let victory be to the virtues of Dharma" when Duryadhona sought her blessings on the eve of the battle for victory to be on his side. Gandhari failed to utter "Let victory be yours my son" against the dictates of eternal dharma (religion).

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## *Notes and References*

1. *Prachin Sahitya* (1907) and *Adhunik Sahitya* (1907) are collections of critical essays on Sanskrit and Nineteenth Century Bengali literatures respectively.
2. 'Ramayana' (1903), *Prachin Sahitya*
3. 'Arogya' (1940), *Kalantar.*
4. 'Ramayana', *Ibid.*
5. P. L. Vaidya and A.D. Pushalkar : "The Mahabharata : Its History and Culture", *The Cultural Heritage of India,* Vol. II (1969) p. 96.
6. 'Krishnacharitra' (1895). Included in Rabindranath's *Adhunik Sahitya.* The essay was written as a review of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya's massive research-work of the same name on the *Mahabharata.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *'Bharatvarshe Itihaser Dhara',* 1912.
10. 'Sahityer Matra' (1933), *Sahityer Swarup*
11. 'Kadamvari-chitra' (1899) *Prachin Sahitya*
12. 'Kumar-Sambhav O Shakuntala' (1901) *Prachin Sahitya*
13. 'Kadambari Chitra', (1899).

    Rabindranath uses the term' Swargaprapti' i.e. attainment of heaven to mean the end of the story. But in Bengali 'Swargaprapti' sometime may also mean 'ending in a waste' with a slight tinge of sarcasm.
14. *Mahabharata,* Shanti Parva, Chapter 299
15. 'Krishnacharitra', *Adhunik Sahitya.*
16. *Mahabharata,* Adiparva, Arjunavasaparbadhyaya
17. Rabindranath Tagore, Chithipatra Vol. 6. Lettters exchanged between Rabindranath and Jagadish Chandra Bose.
18. *Mahabharata,* Udyoga Parva, Chap. 146. The total number of slokas describing the encounter of Karna and Kunti is 24.
19. *Mahabharata,* Banaparva. Tirthyayatraparvadhyaya. Chapters 127-129
20. Ramendrasundar Trivedi, 'Dharmer Jay' (1903), *Karma- Katha*(1913).

    Ramendrasundar, a great scholar and thinker, derived his idea of 'Destiny' from the Rgvedic conception of ऋत. Analysing this idea of ऋत Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan says :

    The tendency towards the mystic conception of an unchanging realiy shows its first sign here. The real is the unchanging law. What is an unstable show, an imperfect copy. The real is one without parts and changes, while the many shift and pass. Soon this cosmic order becomes the settled will of a Supreme god, the law of morality and righteousness as well. Even the gods cannot transgress it. We

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see in the conception of *Rita* a development from the physical to the divine. *Rita* originally meant the "established route of the world of the sun, moon and stars, morning and evening, and night." Gradually it became the path of morality to be followed by man and the law of the right consciousness observed even by gods..... The whole universe is founded on *Rita* and moves in it. –*History of Indian Philosophy*, Part I, (1983) p. 79.

21. Although Gandhari does not utter the term Rita, actually Dharma and Rita are identical.

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